A RARE SURYA IMAGE IN G. D. COLLEGE MUSEUM

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The late Prof. R.K. Choudhary has put it that "Begusarai is historically rich, culturally important and industrially the focal point of North Bihar"[1]. It is almost a virgin soil from exploration point of view. It has a rich past, every mound, every stone,every heap of ruins has a history of its own to tell only if they could speak. In this context, several examples of the iconographic evidence have been brought to light of which a rare Sūrya image is one.

The famous Sūrya image was found at Phulbaria near Barauni in digging from a well and collected by late Prof. R.K. Choudhary and A. Kumar (present principal of G.D. College, Begusarai). Now it is preserved in K.P. Jayaswal Historical and Archaeological Society and Museum of G.D. College, Begusarai. The antiquity number of this icon is 301. It is made of black basalt stone, generally available from Rajamahal hill. The stele is pointed on the upper portion. The stele of the image, under review, is 78.5 cm in length and 42 cm in width. The main figure of the Sūrya from crown to boot is 57 cm. in length and 24 cm in width.

The main figure is of the Sun God who is in standing posture. The standing Sūrya icon of black stone have been found from various parts of Mithilā during the Pāla and Karnāṭā period.[2] The Karnāṭā artist followed the artistic model of the Pāla. The land of modern Begusarai district was part and parcel of both the rulers i.e. the Pālas and Karnāṭas. Therefore, this image may be dated either to Pāla or to Karnāṭa period.

Almost all iconographic representations are perceptible in our image, Standing on a lotus pedestal. There is halo behind the head of the figure, carved on the stone. It is not circular but oblong. The presentation of Sun-dise begins from Gupta period[3] and continued all Pāla and the Karnāṭa period, because almost all Sūrya icons found from different parts of North Bihar are adorned with halo.[4] Our image wears Kiriṭa-Mukuṭa. Pointed probably with Kiriṭa Mukuṭa is seen in every medieval Sūrya figure of Eastern India.[5] Long hair has been shown on his head. A circular ear-ring in each earlobe is found on both of the shoulders. He is seen bearing a beautiful necklace over his chest and Yajñopavita, which we do not find in early

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icons.The Yajñopavīta is shown by three minuted threads hanging down from the left shoulder upto the right thigh. There is no cloth above his waist while below his waist transparent cloth is seen. Foldings and curves may be seen on it. The two legs are booted and naturally the foreign influence is perceptible.[6] There are a few images of Sūrya, belonging to the Pāla and Sena period, have been found in Bengal. Here we find that the boot is absent from the feet of the Sūrya icons. The fingers of the feet of the Sūrya images have been easily shown but the image under review bears long boots in his feet. This is a Kusanian affinity, traditionally carried down upto the Pālas and Karnāṭs period. It is said that originally the worship of the sun image was done in Iran-Magi or Saka Brāhmaṇa, brought this cult from Iran to India. There was a belief prevalent in Iran that there would be a disaster if the fingure of the sun image would be shown. That is why, artist of Iran showed boots in the feet of the sun image. The same belief was passed on from Iran to India and it continued upto Pāla and Karnāṭa period, at least western part of Magadha but the artist belonging to the Pala and Sen period of Bengal made some innovation. They were not very influenced by the artist of the western part of Magadha.

The Sūrya has got two hands. He wears armlet in each arm and bracelet on his wrists. His both hands are holding a long stem of double petalled lotus flowers. All these attributes can be seen in several Sūrya icons of North Bihar belonging to this period.

Near his knee, there is a figure of goddess, depicted up to the thigh of the main deity. She is holding Mukuṭa on her head. There are ear-rings in her both earlobs. She wears necklace on her chest. She is touching her both breasts with her right hand holding a Kamaṇḍala is losely hanging down. She is Manasveta, one of the consorts of Sūrya. The appearance of such a deity with sun god is the special feature of the image under consideration. Just in front of her thigh, there is depiction of a male figure which is mutilated. He has got two hands but his legs are not prominent. He is in sitting position. Perhaps, he is Arun, the chariot driver of the God. The driver Arun is essentially seen in every image of the Sūrya from beginning up to the mediaeval period.[7] He is driving chariot by seven horses. One is in the centre and three horses are depicted on each side.

On the left side of the main figure is a female figurine which is highly decked with ornaments. She appears in standing pose. She has got two hands. Both hands are loosely hung down resting on her thighs. She is perhaps a queen of the main deity.

On the right side of the female figure, there is a bearded male figure with a Mukuṭa on his head. He is wearing several ornaments, like nacklace, armlets, bracelets etc. He is wearing dhotī below his navel. He has got two hands. He is holding an inkpot in his left hand and a pen in his right hand. He is Pingal. The figure of Pingal with inkpot has been seem

in the Gupta period[8] also but appearance of a pen is unique feature of the image. Just near the knee of the male figure, there is a female figure in sitting posture. She is looking left and shooting arrow. She is holding a bow in her right hand and her left hand is near her left ear. She is perhaps Uṣā.

On the left side of the main figure, there is highly decorated ornamented a female figure. She is holding a Chammar in her right hand and the left hand is resting on her left thigh. She is perhaps Rajanī, a queen of the Sūrya. She also may be seen holding chamara in the Sūrya image of Madhubani district.[9]

Just near his knee, there is a female figure. She is in shooting position. She is holding a bow, in her left hand and her right hand is resting up to her ear. She is Pratyūsa. Both figures, namely Uṣā and Pratyūsa may be seen engaged in chasing darkness with their bows and arrows in several mediaeval images of the Sūrya, found in different parts of Eastern India.[10]

On the upper portion of the stele, flying Vidyādharas are depicted in each side. The *Mānasāra* describes the flying posture of Vidyādhara.[11] On the right side, he is holding a garland in his both hands. He wears crown on her head, car-rings, armlets and bracelets. He is holding a garland in his both hands. There is a lower garland with lining on it. Same is the case with other side of Vidyādhara.

Just near the right hand of the main figure, there is a depiction of male figure, riding on a lion. He is in standing position. The back two legs and front two legs of the lion are folding.There is a depiction of seated elephant with a male rider on his back. The same figure is also depicted on the left side of the figure.

On the extreme left of the main figure, Revanta, the son of the Sūrya is depicted in standing position. He bears Mukuṭa on his head.He is wearing car-rings, necklace, bracelets and armlets. His yajñopavīta is hanging from his left shoulder down to his right thigh, lower garment (dhotī) is shown below his waist with lining on it. The deity is holding a wine cup in his half bent right hand. A long sword is in his left hand. Daṇḍi usually holds a sword in his left hand. The edges of the sword have been finally depicted.We know from the iconographic text that Revanta usually holds a sword and a wine cup in his hands. The depiction of Revanta, the son of the Sūrya is a very peculiar in this sculpture, under consideration.

After a careful analysis of the figure of the Sun mentioned above, it may be concluded that there are some rare features in the image. Firstly the son of the Sūrya, Revanta has been clearly depicted along with other supporting deities. Secondly, it may be pointed out that the sun image preserved in the G. D. College Museum is rare one as it contains both foreign and Indian concepts mixed in one.

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